Setting aside the third week of May to recognize World Trade Week provides an opportune time to reflect on the importance of international commerce to our quality of life. Officially proclaimed by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1935, World Trade Week has been an annual event.

Over the years, trade has served as a robust catalyst for the American economy, from Wall Street to Main Street. With technological advances in the Internet and transportation, small and medium-sized businesses are now positioned better than ever to boost their bottom line by making new sales abroad. In 2007, the United States reached a record \$1.63 trillion in exports, a 12.6 percent increase from the previous year. These exports helped support millions of American jobs.

Some 246,000 U.S. businesses export, with the vast majority of these being small and medium-sized firms. These exporters represent a wide variety of companies. For example, one family-owned business manufactures pet shampoos and is now selling to 28 countries. Another firm, a family-owned franchiser of professional moving services, recently entered the Irish market. A bed and breakfast that thrives on foreign tourists, a local flower shop that imports Colombian roses, and the neighborhood supermarket are just a few of the many examples of how trade impacts our lives in positive ways. Trade also helps build economic and political stability in key countries abroad, helping boost our national security.

That is why it is more important than ever that the United States continues to pursue new free trade agreements (FTA) with countries around the world—and especially pending agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea. Together with the recently passed Peru FTA, these four FTA markets would provide further access to 126 million consumers with a combined GDP of \$1.1 trillion.

With our free trade partners in Australia, Singapore, Jordan, Israel, Canada, Mexico, and throughout Central and South America, American businesses continue to increase their sales. In 2007, U.S. exports to countries where there was an FTA in effect exceeded \$472 billion, accounting for roughly 41 percent of our Nation's exports.

Small businesses create 70 percent of the new jobs in America, so we must continue to be diligent in helping these firms boost their international sales. The explosive growth in e-commerce has allowed smaller American businesses to expand their international horizons, with over one billion Internet users outside of the United States, many of whom are potential customers for U.S. businesses.

As we gather at World Trade Week events across the country, let us celebrate the many benefits that global trade has brought our communities. Let us above all recognize and continue to build the positive links that trade creates between Americans and the people of the world.

Carlos M. Gutierrez